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ABSTRACT

The schools that Head Start participants enter may have very different methods and attitudes than were present in Head Start, and a different approach to working with children and families. While Head Start programs are seldom in a position to bring about changes in the public schools, Head Start parents can be a powerful force for school change. This guide helps parents work with the schools to ensure the best education for their children. A check list is provided for things parents should know before their children leave the Head Start program. Specific steps to take are given for the first month of school, the rest of the first 6 months, and the rest of the year. Sample letters from parents to the school and from the school to parents are presented, along with a sample parent pledge to support the individual child and the school system. The following 10 essential elements for achieving academic success are listed: (1) high expectations; (2) clear vision; (3) strong leadership; (4) teamwork; (5) staff development; (6) strong, appropriate curriculum; (7) safe, clean, orderly environment for learning; (8) genuine accountability; (9) recognition and reward for excellence; and (10) strong community and parental support. (SLD)

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ED 460 980

PARENTS' GUIDE

After Head Start: Success in Public School

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

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As a parent, here's how you can do your part.

Dear Parent:

Our children and families enter into public school systems that are very different than Head Start. The schools our children enter may have very different methods and attitudes than were present in Head Start, and a very different approach to working with children and families. In many instances, schools are overwhelmed by new demands and unable to make the changes required to provide a first rate education for our children.

The Head Start community cannot ignore this problem which confronts our families. Many programs have implemented *transition programs*, which ease the transition from Head Start to the schools, but these important efforts are generally not directed at changing the school itself. We must do more if our children are to prosper.

While Head Start programs are seldom in the position to make changes in public schools, *Head Start parents* are a potent force for school change. Every year more than 700,000 Head Start parents enroll their children in kindergarten. You and other parents of children entering schools in every county in the United States have the potential to be a powerful voice for change in America's schools.

Parents must be active participants in their children's education and help ensure their children's schools provide an education enabling them to learn and compete in tomorrow's economy. Here's how you can do your part.

Ron Herndon
President
National Head Start Association

Dr. Ethel Simon-McWilliams
Associate Executive Director
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

BE SURE YOU HAVE THIS INFORMATION

1. Where will your child attend kindergarten? _____

2. Is your child enrolled for fall? ☐ Yes ☐ No

3. Who are the contact people in your new school?

   Principal _____ Phone _____

   Teacher _____ Phone _____

4. Which other parents from Head Start will be enrolling in the same elementary school?

   Name _____ Phone _____

   Name _____ Phone _____

   Name _____ Phone _____

   Name _____ Phone _____

   Name _____ Phone _____

5. Do you have copies of your child's records from Head Start? ☐ Yes ☐ No

   Be sure to include medical history, school progress, current performance in all skill areas, teacher recommendations, formal evaluations, Individual Family Service Plans (IFSP), and sample of your

6. Do you know about your child's school:

At least one person to contact for questions and concerns?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Rules and regulations?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Goals for children in kindergarten?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Instructional materials and equipment?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Discipline and behavior policies?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Communication between home and school?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Quality and quantity of parent involvement with the school?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Student/staff population?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Schedule of activities, report cards, closures and meetings?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Transportation (who/what/when/where)?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Meals (who/what/when/where)?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Available support people (counselors, social workers, tutors, special education, interpreters, bilingual programs?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Expected skills to be learned by the completion of kindergarten (reading, spelling, writing, math)?	☐ Yes ☐ No

BEFORE LEAVING HEAD START

DO THESE THINGS BEFORE YOUR CHILD STARTS KINDERGARTEN

1. Have you visited the school with your child? ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. Have you visited the library and gotten a library card for your child? ☐ Yes ☐ No
3. Have you identified a study area and time in your home? ☐ Yes ☐ No
4. Have you talked with your child about the positive aspects of going to school? ☐ Yes ☐ No
5. Have you arranged for all necessary school supplies? ☐ Yes ☐ No
6. Have you established a routine that includes meal time, time to talk, and reading time? ☐ Yes ☐ No
7. Have you discussed the expectations you have for your child and the school? ☐ Yes ☐ No

TIME TO GET ORGANIZED

1. Have you started a telephone tree for parents, beginning with those you know from Head Start? ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. Do you know the principal, and does the principal know you and your child? ☐ Yes ☐ No
3. Is there a current school needs assessment? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   If so, have you reviewed it? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   If no, are there plans to do so? ☐ Yes ☐ No
4. Is there a current school improvement plan? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   If yes, have you read it? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   If no, are there plans to do one? ☐ Yes ☐ No

BE SURE YOU DO THESE THINGS DURING THE FIRST MONTH OF SCHOOL

1. Have you made sure your child attends on time, every day? ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. Have you made sure the school has your current phone, address, and emergency contact numbers? ☐ Yes ☐ No
3. Does your child eat breakfast and lunch? ☐ Yes ☐ No
4. Have you visited your child's classroom and met the teacher? Principal? Others? ☐ Yes ☐ No
5. Do you have a calendar of events posted at home, including parent meetings, events, grading periods, conferences? ☐ Yes ☐ No
6. Do you have a phone list of other parents, including those from Head Start, to share information, ask questions, and go with to school activities? ☐ Yes ☐ No
7. Have you agreed with your child's teacher how and when to contact you with progress information and questions? ☐ Yes ☐ No
8. Do you clearly understand how your child's progress will be measured (tests, observations, portfolios) and when? ☐ Yes ☐ No
9. Do you know what you can do to support your child's academic success (homework, materials, participation)? ☐ Yes ☐ No
10. Do you show your child that you value educational success DAILY by your comments, praise, schedule (turn off television), interest, and participation? ☐ Yes ☐ No

MEET WITH YOUR PRINCIPAL

1. Have you scheduled a meeting with your principal? ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. Have you discussed how to share the information from this meeting with other parents? ☐ Yes ☐ No
3. After your meeting with the principal:

   Have you followed up on the needs assessment and improvement plan? ☐ Yes ☐ No

   Do you know what the next step is? ☐ Yes ☐ No

   Have you identified your family and community resources to assist the plan? ☐ Yes ☐ No

   Have you implemented a "Parent Report Card" to survey parent satisfaction for the first quarter? ☐ Yes ☐ No

   Have you agreed on how the responses from the "Parent Report Card" will be summarized and acted upon? ☐ Yes ☐ No

PARENT REPORT CARD
"Communicating for Change"
How is Your School Doing?

Dear Parents:

Please tell us how we are doing...and how we are treating you and your child. We want to give you the best service possible. After all, you deserve it. To do this, we must get your opinions and comments. Please take a moment to fill out the following. Then, just drop this card in the nearest mailbox. THANK YOU!

Please check one:	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Facilities	☐	☐	☐	☐
Staff	☐	☐	☐	☐
Materials	☐	☐	☐	☐
Staff/Parent relationships	☐	☐	☐	☐
Home activities	☐	☐	☐	☐
Community resource info	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please tell us what you like: _____

Please tell us your concerns: _____

Comments: _____

Please call me at: (phone) _____

Parent's name: _____

Child's name: _____

CONTACT THE SCHOOL STAFF

1. Have you contacted your child's teacher regarding academic and social performance, successes, needs, and questions? ☐ Yes ☐ No

2. Are you and the school staff:
   Celebrating your child's successes? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   Daily addressing areas of need? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   Clear about your child's performance in comparison to peers, grade, and individual potential? ☐ Yes ☐ No

3. Have you received and discussed your child's report card? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   Do you understand it? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   What steps are indicated? ☐ Yes ☐ No

FOLLOW THROUGH ON NEEDED STEPS

1. Have you had AT LEAST monthly contact with your child's teacher? ☐ Yes ☐ No

2. Have you taken steps needed to improve your child's academic and social success in school? ☐ Yes ☐ No

3. Are you satisfied with the program which has been implemented for your child? ☐ Yes ☐ No

4. Have you received feedback from the "Parent Report Cards"? ☐ Yes ☐ No

5. Is there a plan in place to access support from the community, including neighbors, police, social service agencies, churches and local businesses? ☐ Yes ☐ No

6. Have steps been taken to help children and families who don't speak English? ☐ Yes ☐ No

SECOND THROUGH SIXTH MONTH OF SCHOOL

THE REST OF THE SCHOOL YEAR

1. Have you planned a meeting to review and discuss:
   - Progress in meeting goals in the school improvement plan? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   - Results of the second "Parent Report Card"? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   - Responses to parent input? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   - Academic performance of the school? ☐ Yes ☐ No

2. Have you planned steps to address new and ongoing needs? ☐ Yes ☐ No

3. Have you celebrated successes and shared this information? ☐ Yes ☐ No

4. Have you told staff and parents "thank you"? ☐ Yes ☐ No

5. Have you received final report card and progress information on your child? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   - Do you clearly understand this information? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   - If no, do you know who to contact for further information? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   - If you disagree, do you know what to do next? ☐ Yes ☐ No

6. Do you know where your child will attend school next year (school, room, teacher)? ☐ Yes ☐ No

7. Do you know what to work on over the summer to help your child improve areas of need, and build on strengths? ☐ Yes ☐ No

8. Do you have a list of summer activities from the school, parks, library, social service agencies? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   - Have you shared this information with other parents? ☐ Yes ☐ No

9. Have you contacted Head Start for a list of new parents? ☐ Yes ☐ No

THE BEAT GOES ON

Building on the previous year's experience, repeat the process, expand on successes, address old and new needs, and learn from mistakes of the past.

1. Is the system still going? ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. Have new school personnel and parents been brought up to date on last year's efforts? ☐ Yes ☐ No
3. Have you planned a welcome for new parents of children who attended Head Start? ☐ Yes ☐ No
4. Have you followed through on plans from last year? ☐ Yes ☐ No
5. Have you made arrangements to continue successful efforts from last year? ☐ Yes ☐ No
6. Have you held yourself and others accountable for activities and program success? ☐ Yes ☐ No
7. Have you publicized your efforts and successes? ☐ Yes ☐ No
8. Have you identified what your school will need in terms of support from the administration, school board, state and federal programs? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   Have you identified who to contact in each class? ☐ Yes ☐ No
9. Have you shared your efforts with your Head Start program to prepare parents who will be entering the system? ☐ Yes ☐ No

THE REST OF THE YEAR—AND BEYOND

MODEL LETTER TO THE PRINCIPAL

Dear _____ *(principal)*:

Our families are planning to be a part of _____ school. We look forward to working with you to be sure our children get the best possible education. We have high expectations for our children, and for _____ school and its staff.

We would like to meet with you in the near future to discuss the school—its strengths, needs, and plans for improvement. We want to play a meaningful role in achieving excellence for all children in our community.

The following dates and times are possible for us: *(list dates and times)*

Please let _____ *(name and phone)* know when you are available. When we meet, we would specifically like to discuss:

- Current school performance and progress
- School needs assessments
- School improvement plan
- Ongoing projects
- Initiation of a Parent Report Card
- Opportunities for parent and community involvement

Thank you in advance for your efforts. We look forward to playing a meaningful role as a member of the "education team."

Sincerely,

(names of all signing the letter with name of child included)

MODEL LETTER FROM THE PRINCIPAL TO PARENTS

Dear Parents:

Thank you for your response on the "Parent Report Card for _____ _____ school. We received a total of _____ responses, _____ percent of all our parents. The room with the best percentage of return was _____, which received _____ *(prize)* for their efforts.

Your praise, comments, suggestions, questions, and concerns were very helpful in planning our school's improvement. Attached is a summary of the responses. By _____ *(date)* we will have a follow-up letter describing steps to be taken to address your suggestions and concerns. Your excellent ideas will be extremely helpful!

In addition, our school improvement team will be contacting each of you personally if you provided contact numbers and expressed ratings of "fair" or "poor" on your card. We value your input and will work hard to improve your satisfaction with the school, its staff, and programs.

Your comments are always welcome. Please don't hesitate to call me if you have additional feedback, ideas, or questions. WE VALUE YOU ALL!

Again, thank you to all who responsed. Another Parent Report Card will be sent home in _____ and we hope to hear from 100 percent of our families.

Sincerely,

(principal and other appropriate signatures)

As a parent,
I pledge my support
to assure that my school
is one that works.

I pledge I will:

Promote and support school leadership which focuses on academic excellence and equity. I will meet the principal, ask about the school's goals and improvement plan, and ask how I can help.

Actively monitor my child's school program by visiting, calling, asking questions, and following through on activities. I will expect the best from my child and the school, and will support the belief that my child can learn and compete successfully with children worldwide.

Responsibly provide for my child's health and safety at home, as well as in school. I will assure that my child has adequate nutrition, rest, and the time and place to study. I will participate in school activities which help to secure and beautify my child's school environment, and I will take personal pride in maintaining it.

Enter the school with a positive attitude, volunteering my talents, ideas, concerns, and praise toward our common goal of educational excellence.

Never stop learning myself. I will read, listen, and learn with my child and school personnel, attend workshops and meetings, go to the library, watch educational television, and read or listen to my children read from textbooks. I may not know the information, but I will try to learn and demonstrate to my child that I value lifelong learning.

Track my child's growth and progress and that of the school, recognizing the goal is to be the best, not just better than. I will know what reports, grades, and scores mean. I will ask questions until I clearly understand the answer. I will ask WHY things are as they are and WHAT we can do about it.

Support my child's school by asking family, friends, and community members for help. I will identify resources, make phone calls, write letters, ask those I know, and gather information. I will speak proudly of my child's school to the community and help the community realize that an excellent school contributes to an excellent community.

PLEDGE OF SUPPORT

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

You are your child's first and most important teacher. You must play an active role in the education of your child.

Your school should establish regular private meetings with parents to discuss progress, as well as ways ycu can help your child at home with his/her schoolwork.

Here are some ways schools involve parents: parent organizations, open houses, and volunteer programs. Parents should be members of school policy and oversight organizations.

Ways parents can help their children:

- ✓ Parents must feel that their children's achievement in school is important. Children also must be taught that doing well in school is important.
- ✓ Parents should always monitor their children's progress in school.
- ✓ Parents should read to their children frequently, and should frequently listen to their children read.
- ✓ Parents should drastically limit the amount of television their children watch. Children who watch more than 10 hours of television a week have lower school achievement, are less creative, and have smaller vocabularies. Children should not watch shows that contain violence.

REWARDING STUDENT PERFORMANCE

Your school should have:

- ✓ Recognition programs that reward student achievement and effort.
- ✓ Teachers helping students, sincerely caring for them, and guiding them toward genuine success on a daily basis.
- ✓ Several ways to celebrate when students make progress.

RATING YOUR CHILD'S PROGRESS (ASSESSMENT)

Students must be assessed on a regular, ongoing basis. Assessment is a systematic process of gathering evidence of what a child can do. Assessment must be free of cultural, gender, and language biases.

Assessment should be based on what your child actually is learning in the classroom.

Standardized achievement and ability tests should not be used with your child before the third grade. Those tests often result in mistakes about a child's academic ability.

Check assessment used with your child:

- ✓ A wide variety of methods should be used: assigned class work, homework, oral questioning, quizzes, art work, your child's written work, and tests.
- ✓ Letter grades and standardized achievement tests should not be used to assess student performance until after the first four years of schooling. Th[illegible]e methods do not tell us enough about a child's performance and often are wrong about a child's ability.

THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

The curriculum must address the needs of all students and must permit them to see a clear relationship between what they do in school and what they will do in their adult lives.

Children learn in different ways and at different rates, so teaching should be tailored to each individual child; teaching methods must be flexible.

Parents should receive reports which fully explain their child's progress, rather than relying on letter grades, marks, or vague statements about how the child is trying.

Check the curriculum:

- ✓ School programs should allow your children to progress at their own pace.
- ✓ Reading, writing, listening, and speaking should be the primary focus in all classroom activities.
- ✓ The curriculum should allow children to learn through active involvement and play.
- ✓ Children should learn to speak a foreign language in primary school. If this is not offered in your school, ask the principal how and when a foreign language will be offered.

TEACHER TRAINING

There should be training opportunities for teachers so they can keep up-to-date with the most effective teaching methods and materials.

Check Teacher Training:

✓ Each school should provide a strong staff training program based on local needs.

✓ Successful teachers should conduct most teacher training.

✓ Effective teachers should be recognized and rewarded at each school.

TEN ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR ACHIEVING SUCCESS

1. **High Expectations**

   High expectations of students and staff is the first critical element in achieving academic excellence and equity. There must be a firm belief that all children can learn. The principal, teachers, and other school staff must believe all children can learn, and must have high expectations for themselves, their students, and their school.

2. **Clear Vision**

   There must be a clearly stated vision of where the school is going and how it can get there. There must be a statement of the school's mission with clearly defined goals. "Yes" and "no" decisions regarding curriculum, programs, expenditures, schedules, and all operations are all made based on whether or not they support the school's mission.

3. **Strong Leadership**

   The principal must provide strong leadership to achieve academic excellence. The principal must ensure that school has: effective teaching methods, high expectations for staff and students, and all students performing at or above grade level.

4. **Teamwork**

   Teamwork is essential. It is the coordinated effort of everyone involved in the school that turns vision into reality. Principals, staff, parents, and communities must function as a team to achieve school goals.

5. **Staff Development**

   Successful schools provide an ongoing, strong staff training program. No matter how good you are, you can always be better. All building personnel must receive regular, comprehensive training.

6. **Strong, Appropriate Curriculum**

   There must be a comprehensive, and flexible curriculum which meets the needs of students. Curriculum elements are the stepping stones to continuous academic achievement for children.

7. **Safe, Clean, Orderly Environment for Learning**

   Learning takes place best in a safe, clean, and orderly environment. There must be adequate materials, equipment, and supplies.

8. **Genuine Accountability**

   There must be genuine accountability for the performance and progress of staff and students. Everyone is accountable for achieving academic excellence. Accountability must be present at every level. All programs and strategies must be measured regularly to make certain they are producing positive progress toward the school's goals. And there is an "or else"...Despite comprehensive efforts to assist personnel to improve, those who are either incapable or unwilling to change, and therefore continue to hurt students, must be removed.

9. **Recognition and Reward for Excellence**

   Excellence in education deserves regular recognition and reward. Programs should be instituted which reward students, parents, and staff for academic success.

10. **Strong Community and Parental Support**

    Schools benefit greatly from a strong sense of community pride and support. Every effort should be made to encourage meaningful involvement of families and community in the school's operation. All members of the staff must continuously seek the involvement of parents and the community.

WE HAVE MANY PEOPLE AND ORGANIZATIONS TO THANK

Many people and organizations have contributed to the information presented in this booklet.

Two publications, in particular, provide more detailed information:

1. *Partners for Success: Business and Education* presents the stories of 22 principals who have clearly demonstrated that ALL CHILDREN CAN LEARN. Their success stories tell of leadership and team effort turning barriers of poverty into doors of opportunity, resulting in increased student achievement. They show how the *ten essential elements for achieving success* which are described in this booklet can be turned into reality. The publication was produced with the assistance of the Associated Oregon Industries Foundation, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, leading Oregon politicians, and the state's business community.

2. *Saving America's Children: Achieving International Standards in American Schools* presents a blueprint for change based on key points presented by outstanding international educators participating in the Symposium on International Education Standards for Oregon. Material presented in this booklet related to *school curriculum, parent involvement, student self-esteem, student assessment, and teacher training* comes from presentations by Morimichi Ashida of Japan, Rolf-Peter Berndt of the Federal Republic of Germany, David de Mesquita of the United Kingdom, Su Lin of China, and Marion (Heuckendorff) Rumble of Canada. This publication was produced by the Associated Oregon Industries and the National Association for Schools of Excellence.

Both of these publications, and an accompanying *Partners for Success* video, have been distributed to Head Start programs across the nation, and additional copies are available from the National Head Start Association.

Two people deserve special recognition. Dia Norris developed the *questions for parents* to answer before their children leave Head Start and during their first years of public school. Dia is a former coordinator with Albina Head Start Program in Portland, Oregon. Jerry Kirkpatrick contributed significantly to the overall format and content of this booklet for parents. He is director of institutional development and communications for the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

ACKNOWLEDGING HELP AND SUPPORT

Academic excellence for all of our children can be a reality —not just a dream— and your role is critical.

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